

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2874

USIA WASHDC

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, IN

SUBJECT: INDIAN PRESS CONTROLS: MERGER OF WIRE SERVICES

1. LARGELY THROUGH FREQUENT STATEMENTS BY MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING SHUKLA, THE GOI HAS MADE CLEAR ITS INTENTION TO MERGE INTO ONE AGENCY THE FOUR EXISTING INDIAN WIRE SERVICES: PRESS TRUST OF INDIA, UNITED NEWS OF INDIA (BOTH ENGLISH-LANGUAGE), SAMACHAR BHARATI AND HINDUSTAN SAMACHAR AGENCY (BOTH HINDI). THE REACTION OF THE TWO ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SERVICES SO FAR HAS BEEN TO BACK-PEDAL: A JOINT MEETING OF THE AGENCIES' BOARDS IN BOMBAY LAST WEEK DECIDED THAT THE EXECUTIVE BODIES OF THESE AGENCIES ALONE COULD NOT HANDLE THIS QUESTION BUT MUST CONSULT SUBSCRIBER-MEMBERS (I.E., PARTICIPATING NEWSPAPERS). IT DECIDED ALSO TO SEEK FURTHER INFORMATION FROM THE GOI.

2. POSSIBLY IN RESPONSE TO THIS REACTION, AN APPARENTLY INSPIRED STORY THAT APPEARED IN MAJOR PAPERS ON DEC. 14 SAID THAT NEWS AGENCIES OWED LARGE SUMS OF MONEY TO THE GOI FOR "LOANS" AND RENTAL OF TELEPRINTER LINES, WHICH ARE CONTROLLED

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BY THE POST AND TELEGRAPH DEPARTMENT. SAMACHAR BHARATI'S

LINE HAS ALREADY BEEN DISCONNECTED FOR NONPAYMENT.

3. COMMENT: INDIAN JOURNALIST ARE AGREED THAT THE MERGER WILL COME. THEY SEE THE FINANCIAL INDEBTEDNESS STORY BOTH AS A GOOD MERGER AND AS LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR ITS RATIONALE. SHUKLA HAS APPARENTLY ALSO HELD OUT A PLUM TO JOURNALISTS. A RATIONALIZED, SINGLE INDIAN NEWS AGENCY COULD BETTER AFFORD TO DISTRIBUTE ITS CORRESPONDENTS AMONG MORE WORLD CAPITALS. THUS THE NEW INDIAN AGENCY WOULD ALSO NEED TO RELY LESS ON THE SERVICES OF AP, UPI, REUTERS, ETC. THIS IS SEEN AS ANOTHER GOI GOAL IN BETTER CONTROL OF THE INDIAN PRESS.
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